

WILDERNESS RECOMMENDATION

BISCAYNE NATIONAL PARK
DADE COUNTY, FLORIDA

JULY 1983

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

RECOMMENDATION

NONE OF THE LANDS OR WATERS WITHIN BISCAYNE NATIONAL PARK WERE FOUND TO BE SUITABLE FOR WILDERNESS DESIGNATION. ALTHOUGH THE PARK CONTAINS OUTSTANDING EXAMPLES OF ESTUARINE AND MARINE ECOSYSTEMS, THE PROXIMITY--SPATIALLY, VISUALLY, AND ACOUSTICALLY--TO MAJOR DEVELOPMENT AND WELL-ESTABLISHED MOTORIZED ACTIVITY (AIRPLANES, MOTORBOATS, LARGE SHIPS) IS NOT CONDUCIVE TO AN EXPERIENCE OF SOLITUDE AS INTENDED IN THE WILDERNESS ACT OF 1964.

INTRODUCTION

In the 1980 Biscayne National Park legislation Congress directed that the lands and waters within the boundary be studied for their suitability or nonsuitability for wilderness designation, in accordance with the Wilderness Act of 1964.

In its report (December 7, 1979) that accompanied the bill, the Committee on Interior and Insular Affairs asked the National Park Service (NPS) to "give serious consideration to the Wilderness designation potential for parts of the park, not only for land areas, but also with particular regard to subsurface and aquatic resources."

The Wilderness Act of 1964 created a National Wilderness Preservation System to be made up of federally owned lands designated by Congress. The intent was to "secure for the American people of present and future generations the benefits of an enduring resource of wilderness." Congressional designation of each specific wilderness area is required to prevent the piecemeal erosion of wilderness values as a result of the day-to-day pressures and requirements which face federal land managers. The act also ensures public review of the designation process.

The Wilderness Act defines wilderness:

A wilderness, in contrast with those areas where man and his own works dominate the landscape, is . . . an area where the earth and its community of life are untrammelled by man, where man himself is a visitor who does not remain. An area of wilderness is . . . an area of undeveloped federal land retaining its primeval character and influence, without permanent improvements or human habitation, which is protected and managed so as to preserve its natural conditions and which (1) generally appears to have been affected primarily by the forces of nature, with the imprint of man's work substantially unnoticeable; (2) has outstanding opportunities for solitude or a primitive and unconfined type of recreation; (3) has at least five thousand acres of land or is of sufficient size as to make practicable its preservation and use in an unimpaired condition; and (4) may also contain ecological, geological, or other features of scientific, educational, scenic, or historical value.

The Wilderness Act prohibits certain uses in wilderness areas, stating that commercial enterprise, permanent or temporary roads not "necessary to meet minimum requirements for the administration of the area," motor vehicles, motorboats, and other forms of mechanical transport are incompatible with wilderness.

SUMMARY OF WILDERNESS STUDY

The NPS studied wilderness suitability at the same time that the proposal and alternatives were developed for the general management plan (GMP). The results of the wilderness study are therefore related to and consistent with the proposal in the GMP. The wilderness study, the GMP proposal and alternatives, their environmental consequences, and a detailed description of Biscayne National Park were published in a single document in January 1983, the General Management Plan/Development Concept Plan/Wilderness Study and Environmental Assessment (GMP/EA).

All areas within the authorized park boundary, including those not currently in federal ownership, were studied for wilderness suitability. Nonfederal areas cannot be designated as wilderness, but if found eligible, they can be designated as potential wilderness, pending acquisition by the federal government.

The determination of suitability was based on a consideration of the park's resources, purposes, and management and planning objectives as they related to the intent of the Wilderness Act. The most pertinent criteria in assessing suitability came from the Wilderness Act. To be eligible for wilderness an area must now, or in the foreseeable future, be without the lasting imprint of man, conducive to the experience of solitude or unconfined primitive recreation, and of sufficient size to make practicable its preservation and use in an unimpaired condition.

The Wilderness Eligibility chart summarizes the various park areas and their eligibilities for wilderness based on these criteria. Four areas were found to be possibly eligible: the Arsenicker Keys, the southern keys and waters (south of Caesar Creek), the undeveloped portions of Elliott Key, and Sands Key. These areas are shown on the map entitled Areas Possibly Eligible for Wilderness Designation. All other areas of Biscayne National Park were judged not eligible for wilderness, for reasons explained below.

The mainland shoreline is interrupted by development at Black Point, Convoy Point, and Turkey Point. Numerous mosquito ditches, six major drainage canals, and tons of jetsam entwined in the mangroves give ample evidence of man's imprint. An experience of solitude and unconfined primitive recreation is difficult to achieve along the mainland shoreline because of the proximity of development (including visible power plants), the Intracoastal Waterway, motorboat traffic, and airplanes from nearby Homestead Air Force Base.

Similarly, the bay bears man's imprint in the form of dredged and marked channels—including the Intracoastal Waterway—over which the National Park Service has limited jurisdiction, and motorboat scars on the bay bottom. The visitor experience on or under the bay often is not one of solitude or unconfined, primitive recreation, especially on a weekend when the bay is teeming with pleasure craft. As provided in the park's legislation, this area also supports extensive commercial fishing—an activity incompatible with wilderness designation.

Wilderness Eligibility

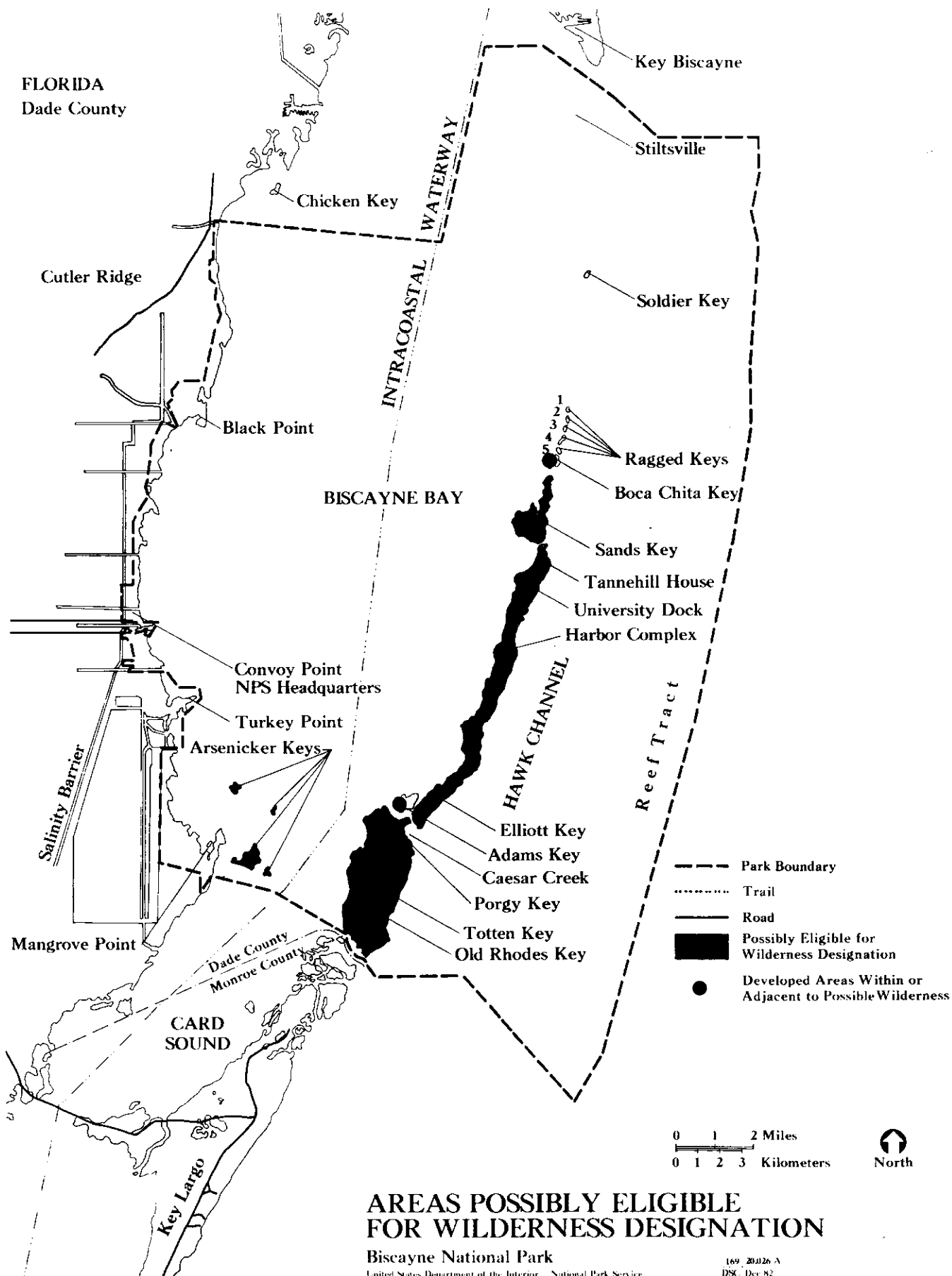
<u>Area of Park</u>	<u>Criteria</u>			<u>Eligibility</u>
	<i>without man's imprint</i>	<i>solitude/unconfined, primitive recreation</i>	<i>sufficient size</i>	
mainland shoreline	O	O	O	not eligible
Arsenicker Keys	X	I	I	possibly eligible
bay	O	O	I	not eligible
southern keys/waters (south of Caesar Creek)	X	I	X	possibly eligible
Adams Key	O	O	I	not eligible
Elliott Key (undeveloped)	I	I	I	possibly eligible
Sands Key	I	I	I	possibly eligible
northern keys (north of Sands Key)	O	O	O	not eligible
Hawk Channel	O	O	I	not eligible
reef tract	O	O	I	not eligible

X = satisfies criteria

I = may satisfy criteria

O = does not satisfy criteria

FLORIDA
Dade County



AREAS POSSIBLY ELIGIBLE FOR WILDERNESS DESIGNATION

Biscayne National Park

United States Department of the Interior National Park Service

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